

Mt. Kisco, NY – Today U.S. Rep. John Hall (D-NY19) stood with hospital officials and employees at the Northern Westchester Hospital (NWH) to call for Congress to halt disastrous cuts in funding to local hospitals proposed in President Bush's fiscal year (FY) 2009 budget proposal.

Under the President's plan, hospitals in New York State, many of whom are already struggling financially under current payment levels, will lose over one billion dollars next year and 10 billion dollars over the next five years. Hospitals in Westchester County are projected to lose \$34,445,000 next year and \$375,609,000 over the next five years under Bush's proposal.

"Northern Westchester Hospital alone would lose \$13.4 million over the next five years and Westchester Medical Center is projected to lose \$136.5 million over the next five years," explained Congressman Hall. "At a time when more and more Americans are struggling to obtain affordable health care, the President wants to slash health care for senior citizens and disabled Americans. These cuts would have a disastrous affect on hospitals in the lower Hudson Valley."

"This would have a significant impact on the hospital and would severely compromise our ability to deliver care to those who often need our care the most: the elderly," said Joel Seligman, President and CEO of NWH. "Reducing the reimbursement for Medicare would hurt hospitals at a time when we are facing sicker and sicker patients from an aging population. This will devastate the already fragile hospital infrastructure in New York State where so many hospitals are barely getting by."

Over 1,000 employees work at Northern Westchester Hospital.

"Severe budget cuts threaten jobs, which is a real problem in this recession," said Hall. "You can't cut 10 billion dollars without significant suffering all around. Many smaller facilities would be forced to close, and larger hospitals like this one will suffer major cutbacks. Without a doubt their capacity to treat patients and their quality of care will diminish."

Congressman Hall pledged to work in Congress to reverse the President's budget cuts and pass a budget that strengthens the economy, provides relief for people struggling through the economic downturn, and brings a change to Washington's failed policy of borrowing and wasteful spending.

"If you think taxes are high now, wait until the federal government starts cutting \$10 billion in services," said Hall. "The onus for dealing with this will fall on state and local governments, who will be obliged to pick up some of the slack. It wouldn't surprise me at all if the end result of these cuts is a dramatic increase in state and local taxes. That is not progress." Nationwide, President Bush proposes to cut over the next five years \$15 billion in updates for inpatient care, \$25 billion from payments to hospitals serving large numbers of poor people, \$20 billion from capital payments used for new buildings and equipment, \$23 billion from payments to teaching hospitals. Hall said these cuts would "undermine our ability to train young doctors at a time when the nation is running the risk of a shortage of physicians."

Medicare provides an annual payment update to providers, designed to reflect the year-to-year increases in health care costs. The non-partisan Medicare Payment Advisory Commission recommended Medicare payments to hospitals increase about three percent in 2009, to account for this expected increase in costs. But the President's budget eliminates this update for

hospitals, hospices, skilled nursing facilities, home health agencies, and long term care and rehabilitation facilities for the next three years, and cuts payments every year thereafter.

"The President should be working with Congress to strengthen Medicare, not undermine it," said Hall. "These drastic reductions threaten coverage for millions, will force cutbacks by hospitals and discourage healthcare providers from serving Medicare beneficiaries. With millions of Americans remaining uninsured, we must work to expand access to reliable, affordable health care, not reduce it."

Earlier this year, Congressman Hall secured \$95,305 to help NWH design and construct a new Emergency Department. After meeting with employees of the hospital, Hall toured the new Emergency wing.

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